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ABSTRACT

California high school English language arts teachers (n=467) representing 79 high schools and 49 school districts responded to a survey regarding their classroom assessment practices. A random sampling of 115 teachers completed a follow-up survey that focused on beliefs and values relative to assessment. Research questions were: (1) What are the prevalent assessment practices and beliefs among high school English language arts teachers in California, and to what degree do reported assessment practices conform to the expectations of assessment reform, specifically the use of varied performance assessments, including portfolios, and assessment tools? and (2) Do current assessment practices among English language arts teachers differ according to student characteristics (i.e., grade level, ability level, percent of minority population)? Results showed that assessment activities tend to be a mix of traditional paper and pencil activities and formal writing assignments. Although paper and pencil activities appear to dominate in terms of regular and routine use, writing activities carry more weight when teachers compute course grades. Writing portfolios are not in general use. On the other hand, most teachers indicated the routine use of informal performance assessments (i.e., group and class participation), while 45% assign group products and presentations. Further, expressed teacher beliefs may be more reflective of assessment reform than is reported assessment practice (e.g., rubrics are valued by virtually all respondents, but used by less than half). (Contains 47 references and 11 tables of data; includes copy of the questionnaire.) (TB)

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What Counts in English Class?

Selected Findings from A Statewide Study of California High School Teachers

A Paper Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association

San Francisco, 1995

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What "Counts" in English Class?

by

Keni Brayton Cox

Four hundred and sixty seven California high school English language arts teachers representing 79 high schools and 49 school districts responded to a survey, administered in April-May, 1994, regarding their classroom assessment practices. A random sample of 115 teachers completed a follow-up survey which focused on beliefs and values relative to assessment. This paper reports selected findings of that research relative to two questions:

1. What are the prevalent assessment practices and beliefs among high school English language arts teachers in California, and to what degree do reported assessment practices conform to the expectations of assessment reform, specifically the use of varied performance assessments, including portfolios, and assessment tools (e.g., written standards or rubrics; student self assessment), and portfolios?

2. Do current assessment practices among English language arts teachers differ according to student characteristics (i.e., grade level, ability level, percent of minority population)?

Most of the assessment reform rhetoric has centered on large-scale accountability systems. At the time this study was designed the future of large-scale performance assessment in California appeared more promising than it does today. The governor's veto of legislation need to fund the program makes the future of reformed statewide assessment tentative, at best. Regardless of what occurs in the arena of large-scale

assessment, however, teachers will continue to design curriculum, instruct students, and assign grades. The impact of those grades on both individuals and groups of students is significant.

Although it was not the intent of this study to advocate any particular kind of assessment, performance-based or otherwise, the rationale for assessment reform is persuasive. An underlying assumption guiding this study, however, was that reform efforts centering on assessment must deal explicitly with existing assessment norms and he role of the classroom teacher if any real change is going to occur.

This paper is divided into four sections. The opening, "Context for Assessment Reform," summarizes the rationale for assessment reform, key findings in classroom assessment research, and specific implications for English language arts assessment. The second section is a brief description of the methodology, the study population and sample and instrumentation. Major findings are shared in the third section, followed by conclusions and discussion. Tables are noted and appended on the page following the initial reference.

Context for Assessment Reform

Student assessment, particularly those kinds of assessment used for public accountability, is a central focus of the current reform in education. The rationale for moving away from norm-referenced standardized testing to assessments which are performance-based comes from a number of quarters including researchers, practitioners, and policy makers (Mitchell, 1992; Newman, 1991; Resnick and Resnick, 1989; Shepard, 1989). Three arguments dominate the discussion:

1) Traditional assessment measures no longer reflect desired skills and outcomes (Resnick and Resnick, 1989; Wiggins, 1989a).

2) Traditional measures limit rather than promote equal opportunities to learn; ((Garcia & Pearson, 1991; Hiebert, 1991; Mitchell, 1992; Resnick & Resnick, 1989). Nationally, students from lower socio economic groups, typically minority students, perform less well on standardized achievement tests than do their more affluent peers.

3) Large-scale accountability measures have become high stakes for teachers, resulting in an unintended impact on classroom practice, (Shepard, 1990). Sanctions and rewards, including media coverage, attached to test scores result in teachers teaching to the test, narrowing their own content and instruction in order to meet the expectations of the test (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985;Dorr-Bremme & Herman, 1986).

If traditional assessment tools no longer measure valued outcomes, tend to negatively affect instruction, and discriminate against large segments of the population, why not design measures which will shape instruction in desirable ways? (Wiggins, 1989b, 1992) Resnick and Resnick (1989) summarize it simply: "...build assessments toward which you want educators to teach" (p. 66). "Assessments should be designed so that when teachers do the natural thing--that is, prepare their students to perform well--they exercise the kinds of abilities and develop the skills and knowledge that are the real goals of educational reform" (Resnick & Resnick, 1989, p. 67). It is that principle, "what you test is what you get," which frames the arguments for using performance assessment as a catalyst for educational reform. The strategy focuses on

the idea that though teachers might still teach to the test, it will be a "better" test (i.e. broader, more relevant, less contrived).

Classroom Assessment

Often left out of the discussion on assessment reform and the "you get what you test; what you test is what you get" equation are the role of the classroom teacher, classroom assessment practice, and the factors which influence classroom assessment.

"There are fundamental, far reaching differences between the science of standardized testing and the assessment demands of the classroom" (Stiggins, Conklin & Bridgeford, 1986, p. 28). The consensus among researchers is that research and training programs, to date, have focused much more on formal assessments, such as standardized testing, than on less formal, classroom assessment (Airasian, 1991; Nitko, 1989; Stiggins, et al.,1989; Stiggins, et al., 1986; Terwilliger, 1989). "Unfortunately, due to the narrow scope of measurement research, we know little about the nature, role or quality of school assessment: [assessments] developed and used by teachers in the classroom..." (Stiggins, et al., 1986, p. 6).

Concerns regarding lack of adequate assessment skills and training among teachers are evident in much of the classroom assessment literature (Jett & Schafer, 1992; Airasian, 1991; Schafer, 1991; Stiggins, 1991; Barnes, 1985; Stiggins, et al., 1989; O'Sullivan & Chalnick, 1991; O'Sullivan & Johnson, 1993) Although there are no written generally accepted standards for teacher-developed tests or classroom assessment procedures, a number of measurement experts and researchers have identified desirable practices (Schafer, 1991; O'Sullivan & Johnson, 1993; Newman & Stallings, 1982), and found

them lacking in the field. Schafer (1991) cites assessment planning and development and the evaluation and improvement of assessment tools as areas neglected by classroom teachers. The failure of teachers to examine, revise, or reconsider their own grading practices is confirmed by others (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985; Stiggins, et al, 1989). In instances where teachers are using performance measures, there is emerging evidence that no clear standards have been identified for the assessment of these products and performances (Cox, 1993; Stiggins, 1992). The value of these standards has been confirmed by a 1990 document entitled, Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students, developed by the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council on Measurement in Education.

The focus of assessment reform is performance assessment, assessments which are described as contextualized tasks which replicate as closely as possible real life experience. Unlike more traditional methods, which can be administered and scored by either a teacher or a technician, successful implementation of these assessments for large-scale accountability purposes requires the direct involvement of teachers, thus more expertise, not less.

Another variable in classroom assessment practice is the degree to which grades represent achievement. Achievement factors appear to be primary in grading students, but the degree of consideration given social variables, specifically non-achievement factors, gives cause for concern among measurement and classroom assessment experts and researchers. The types of non-achievement related factors considered by teachers when grading students are student effort, student attitude,

extra credit, completion of homework and other assignments (Barnes, 1985; Brookhart,1991; Pilcher, 1994; Stiggins, et al., 1989).

Assessment Reform and English Language Arts

The focus of this study is high school English classrooms in California. High school English courses traditionally include reading, writing, listening, speaking. The reforms of the past decade have included the integration of reading and writing within a literature-based curriculum. This whole language approach emphasizes student interaction and is consistent with constructivist learning theories (Hiebert, 1991) For the purposes of this research, however, course content was relevant only in terms of how it may be assessed.

Reforms not withstanding, writing continues to be a central part of English language arts instruction. Writing instruction is one area where practice appears to be replicating research as evidenced by the widespread implementation of "process writing" or "writing as a process" (Applebee, 1986). Still missing, however, is a generally accepted notion of what constitutes effective assessment of student writing (Huot, 1991; Witte, et al., 1989). How should writing be assessed? What constitutes a valid assessment? What do writing scores mean?

In the last decade, assessments in writing have led large-scale assessment reform. The direct assessment of writing as a large-scale accountability measure marked the beginning of California's reform effort in 1986. In 1992-93, 35 state assessments included direct writing (Barton & Coley, 1994). Nevertheless, the research on assessment

practice in English language arts classrooms is very narrow, especially at the secondary level.

A major contribution of large-scale direct writing assessments has been the development of a variety of scoring protocols, including holistic, analytic, and primary trait scoring (Huot, 1990; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990). What each of these procedures has in common is the establishment of agreed-upon criteria for the assessment of student writing and the basis for establishing consistency in scoring which can be demonstrated via inter-rater reliability. Little is known, however, regarding the transfer of these strategies to classroom assessment.

An explicit intent of the California state direct writing assessment was to effect change in the classroom (Carlson, 1991). Hundreds of California teachers have participated as writing evaluators each year, yet we know little about the transfer of these assessment experiences to the classroom. To what degree do English teachers use writing as an assessment activity? What kinds of writing? Are other kinds of performance assessments used? Are rubrics or other written standards routinely employed? What role do writing portfolios play in classroom assessment? Or, student self assessment? Are grades in English class affected by non-achievement related student behaviors? Are grading procedures the same regardless of grade level, student ability, or minority population?

Each of these questions was addressed by this study.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The target population for this study was medium to large high schools (1600 students or more) in school districts with a minimum of two high schools. Excluding four districts for logistical reasons, 269 California high schools met this criteria. In order to provide a representative picture of California's diverse student population, these schools were stratified according to percent of minority student population and a random sample of 90 schools was identified. The final sample of 79 schools was representative of the population, according to percent of minority student population. The initial survey was sent to 1201 teachers with 467 completed responses representing a 39 percent return. The follow-up survey was sent to a random sample selected from 344 volunteers. The 115 returned surveys represented an 83 percent return. As illustrated in Table 1, the distribution of returns from the second sample is representative of the first sample according to percent of minority students.

Teacher and Student Characteristics

Responding teachers can generally be described as experienced teachers of English: The majority reported ten or more years of experience. Seventy percent reported undergraduate degrees in English and one half reported graduate degrees. Two thirds of the respondents were female. Data are displayed in Table 2. Also illustrated in Table 2 are the numbers of teachers who participated in the California subject area projects, projects designed to support implementation of current reforms, including assessment. [Note: Data examining the relationship

Table 1

Summary of Population and Two Samples According to Percent of Minority Students

Percent of Minority Students	Percent of Total Schools	Percent of Schools & Teachers: Survey One		Percent of Teachers Survey Two
	n=269*	n=79 Schools	n=467 Teachers	n=115
80 - 99	20	22	22	19
60 - 79	22	22	23	21
40 - 59	29	28	25	30
20 - 39	23	24	27	24
<20	6	5	6	5

*California high schools with 1600 or more students in districts with at least two high schools in districts of <50,000 9-12 ADA.

TABLE 2

Number and Percent of Teachers According to Years of Experience Teaching English, Gender, Academic Preparation, Participation in Subject Matter Projects

	TOTAL		Percent of Student Minority Population									
			80-99		60-79		40-59		20-39		<20	
Years Teaching English n=452*	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1-5	139	30.8	24	26.6	48	45.2	30	27.3	27	22.3	10	40
6-10	72	15.9	20	22.2	18	16.9	18	16.4	14	11.6	2	8
11-15	66	14.6	16	17.7	14	13.2	11	10.0	24	19.8	1	4
16-20	73	16.2	17	18.8	7	6.6	19	17.2	24	19.8	6	24
20+	102	22.6	13	14.4	19	17.9	32	29.0	32	26.4	6	24
Gender n=455												
Female	305	67.0	63	70.0	66	62.8	77	68.1	80	65.6	19	76
Male	150	32.9	27	30.0	39	37.0	36	31.8	42	34.4	6	24
Undergraduate Degree n=458												
English Major	320	69.9	54	62.1	74	69.2	76	66.1	91	73.9	25	96.2
English Minor	77	16.8	17	19.5	16	15.0	25	21.7	18	16.6	1	4
Other	61	13.3	16	18.4	17	15.9	14	12.2	14	11.4	-	-
Graduate Degree Reported n=467												
Yes	256	54.8	55	60.4	47	43.5	63	53.8	76	60.8	15	57.7
Participation in Subject Matter Projects												
Writing Project n=458	124	27.1	20	22.5	27	25.7	36	31.6	37	29.8	4	15.4
Literature Project n=457	56	12.3	10	11.2	14	13.2	15	13.4	13	10.4	4	16.0

*Differences in 'n' are due to missing data.

of specified teacher characteristics to assessment are not included in this paper, but are available in the full discussion of this study (Cox, 1994).

Before answering the questions on the first questionnaire, teachers were asked to identify a specific class as a referent for all responses and to identify this class according to grade level and student ability level. Identified classes were evenly distributed across grade levels: Grade 9 - 125 classes; grade 10 - 106 classes; grade 11 - 105 classes; grade 12 - 91 classes. Thirty six teachers identified a combination grade class. Relative to student ability level, more than half (56%) of the teachers identified the students in their selected class as "average" or "mixed ability" while 33 percent described their students as "above average" or "honors" level. Twelve percent marked "below average." These data are illustrated in Table 3.

Report of Findings

What are the prevalent assessment practices among California high school English teachers and to what degree to these activities and procedures reflect current reform efforts in assessment?

In order to identify the kinds of assessment activities used most often in English language arts classes, teachers were asked to respond to 18 items, according to a four point scale:

1) I do not currently use this type of assessment activity;

2) I use this type of activity, but it is not used for assessment purposes;

3) I occasionally use this type of activity for assessment;

4) This is a regular and routine activity used for assessment purposes in this class.

TABLE 3

Number and Percent of Classes Identified For Survey One According to Grade Level and Student Ability

	Total		Percent of Student Minority Population									
			80-99		60-79		40-59		20-39		<20	
Grade Level n=463*	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
9	125	26.9	21	23.0	36	34.3	31	26.7	30	24.0	7	26.9
10	106	22.9	26	28.6	20	19.1	25	21.6	28	22.4	7	26.9
11	105	22.7	19	20.9	21	20.0	28	24.1	33	26.4	4	15.4
12	91	19.7	11	12.1	23	22.0	21	18.1	28	22.4	8	30.8
Combination	36	7.8	14	15.4	5	4.8	11	9.5	6	4.8	-	-
Student Ability Level n=459												
Honors	89	19.6	14	15.9	17	16.0	31	26.7	20	16.3	7	26.9
Above Average	62	13.7	5	5.7	11	10.4	11	9.5	27	22.0	8	30.8
Average	128	28.2	28	31.8	30	28.3	30	25.9	35	28.5	5	19.2
Mixed	128	28.2	25	28.4	31	29.2	34	29.3	33	26.8	5	19.2
Below Average	52	11.5	15	18.2	17	16.0	10	8.6	8	7.0	1	3.8

*Differences in n due to missing data

The 18 items described specific assessment activities and were categorized in three sections: Paper and Pencil Activities, excluding essays and compositions, included five items, including the most traditional measures (tests and quizzes; daily homework). Nine activities were specified as Writing Activities, including writing portfolios, stages of the writing process, final drafts of writing assignments, and creative writing. The last section, Performance Assessment Activities, had four items, including individual and group products and presentations. Only responses of responses of "routine and regular use" are reported here. Responses are summarized, across all categories, in Table 4, and summarized below.

The greatest number of high school English language arts teachers, 367 or 80 percent of the respondents, identified daily homework and/or in class assignments as a routine or regular part of their classroom assessment practice, followed by teacher-developed tests or quizzes (68%). Both of these items are traditional, paper and pencil activities. Group or class participation was identified as a routine assessment activity by sixty four-percent of the teachers. This was the only non-writing, performance item marked as routine by a majority of teachers. A majority of teachers identified three types of writing assignments as routine and regular parts of their assessment practice: final drafts of writing assignments (62%); stages of the writing process (56%); and integrated reading/writing assessments (53%). The latter item was a direct reference to the type of assessment introduced in 1993 as part of the California state assessment system . Among those items marked as routine by a majority of teachers, two were paper and pencil activities; two were performance activities; and three were writing

Table 4

Summary of Assessment Activities Identified as Routine by California High School Teachers

Activity	Category	No.	%
Daily homework/ in-class assignments n=458	Paper/Pencil	367	80
Teacher developed tests/quizzes n=449	Paper/Pencil	313	68
Group, class participation n=456	Performance	288	64
Final drafts of writing assignments n=459	Writing	277	62
Stages of writing process n=459	Writing	257	56
Integrated reading/writing n=455	Writing	243	53
Group products/presentations n=456	Performance	205	44.8
Journals/logs n=454	Writing	186	41
On-demand writing n=458	Writing	174	38
Individual products suitable for display n=453	Performance	157	34.6
Writing portfolios n=454	Writing	146	32.2
Research paper n=457	Writing	138	30.2
Ind. oral presentation n=456	Performance	136	29.8
Creative writing n-459	Writing	117	25.5
Published tests/quizzes n=449	Paper/Pencil	59	13.1
District-level writing assessments n=458	Writing	24	5.5
Department-developed quizzes n=441	Paper/Pencil	13.	2.9

activities. Only 32 percent of the teachers reported routine use of writing portfolios.

The least-used assessment activities were those developed by someone other than the teacher: published tests and quizzes (13%); district developed tests (.7%) and writing assessments (6%); and department-developed assessments (3%). These data support earlier research relative to teacher dependence on assessments personally developed (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992).

Non-Achievement Related Factors

As cited earlier, previous research in classroom assessment has suggested that teachers often consider non-achievement related factors when grading students. In this survey, teachers were asked to indicate according to a three-point scale (1=Primary consideration; 2=Secondary consideration; 3= No consideration), the degree of consideration they give six student characteristics or behaviors not directly related to achievement.

As illustrated in Table 5, eight of ten responding teachers indicated that they give primary consideration to completion of assignments, while a majority, 57 percent, give primary consideration to the "on time" completion of assignments. Student ability relative to achievement receives primary consideration from over one third (35%) of the teachers, and student effort receives primary consideration by 30 percent of the teachers. Another 60 percent of the teachers indicated that they give some consideration to student effort. Attendance and extra credit receive somewhat less consideration with extra credit receiving "no consideration" from 38 percent of the responding teachers.

TABLE 5

Degree of Consideration Given Selected Non-Achievement Related Factors When Assigning Course Grades

	Degree of Consideration					
	Primary		Moderate		None	
Factor	n	%	n	%	n	%
Completion of Assignments n=464	379	81.7	77	16.6	8	1.7
On-Time Completion of Assignments n=460	262	57.1	181	39.3	17	3.7
Student Ability Relative to Achievement n=462	160	34.6	242	53.4	60	13.1
Effort, Willingness to Learn n=460	138	30	278	60.4	44	9.6
Attendance n=455	128	28.1	224	49.2	103	22.6
Extra Credit n=446	11	2.5	265	59.4	170	38.1

*Differences in 'n' are due to missing data.

Combining the primary and moderate consideration responses across all items, one can conclude that most teachers do consider non-achievement related factors, including effort when assigning student grades, supporting research cited earlier (Pilcher, 1994; Stiggins, et al., 1989; Barnes, 1985).

What "Counts" In English Class?

Among all types of assessment activities (writing, paper and pencil and performance assessments) and non-achievement factors (completion of assignments and other student behaviors), what "counts" most when teachers assign grades? Teachers were asked to consider seven types of assessment activities and individual student behaviors and to indicate the degree of importance given each according to a three-point scale: 3=Primary Importance; 2=Secondary Importance; 3=Not Important. Items were clustered into eight categories:

1. Essays/compositions/creative writing
2. Daily homework/in-class assignments
3. Paper and pencil tests and quizzes
4. Individual products (other than writing)
5. Group products and presentations
6. Individual oral presentations
7. Individual student behaviors (e.g. effort, attendance, on-time completion)
8. Portfolios (graded as a whole)

The factors are listed in Table 6 in rank order according to the number of teachers who rated each item of "primary importance.

TABLE 6

Degree of Importance Given
Selected Classroom Assessment Activities and
Student Behaviors When Assigning Student Grades

	Degree of Importance					
	Primary		Secondary		None	
Assessment Factors	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Essays/Compositions/Creative Writing n=457*	412	90.2	40	8.8	5	1.1
Daily homework/in-class assignment n=456	289	63.4	157	34.4	10	2.2
Paper and pencil tests and quizzes n=454	212	46.7	202	44.5	40	8.8
Individual products other than writing n=445	188	42.2	214	48.1	43	9.7
Group products and presentations n=454	166	36.6	249	54.8	39	8.6
Individual oral presentations n=452	147	32.5	243	53.8	62	13.7
Ind. Student behaviors (e.g. effort, attend., on-time completion) n=455	129	28.4	265	58.2	61	13.4
Portfolios (graded as a whole) n=424	92	21.7	150	35.4	182	42.9

*Differences in 'n' are due to missing data.

As Table 6 illustrates, the largest number of teachers, nine out of ten respondents identified writing activities (essays, compositions, creative writing) as having primary importance when computing student grades. A smaller number, but still a majority of teachers, 63 percent, also reported giving primary importance to daily homework and in-class assignments while another third (34%) consider these items of secondary importance. Comparing these data to those displayed in Table 4, one can conclude that although daily homework and in-class assignments are assigned more often than writing assignments, these items count less than writing activities when teachers compute grades. The third item, in order of importance, was paper and pencil tests and quizzes, which was marked of primary importance by 47% of the teachers.

If we were to combine the two rankings, primary importance and secondary importance, the results would support the conclusion that at least 86% of the teachers give some importance to individual and group products and individual oral presentations. It is reasonable to conclude that teachers consider a variety of achievement indicators when computing course grades.

Non-achievement related factors (i.e. individual student behaviors), are considered of primary importance by 28 percent of the teachers and of secondary importance by an additional 58%. With only 13 percent, 61 teachers, discounting these behaviors when grading students, the data continue to support the conclusion that student grades in English represent more than achievement.

In this context, portfolios stand out. Portfolios, graded as a whole, was the only item marked not important by a largest number of teachers, 182 or 43 percent. This finding is consistent, however, with data reported

earlier regarding the relatively small number of teachers, 146 (32%) reporting the regular use of portfolios.

Assessment tools and procedures.

While the three categories within Part I of the survey focused on student assessment activities, Part II addressed the kinds of strategies teachers employ to grade those activities. This section asked teachers to indicate their degree of use of nine tools and procedures used by teachers to assess a variety of activities in English class. The first seven of these tools and procedures focused on assessment of student writing; items 8 and 9 are tools which may be used formally or informally to assess a variety of student activities.

Types of Assessment Tools and Procedures

1. Written feedback
2. Oral feedback
3. Rubrics or written standards for writing
4. Rubrics or standards for portfolios
5. Informal standards, not written, for writing
6. Peer assessment
7. Student self assessment
8. Rubrics or written standards for performance tasks
9. Observation checklists

The nine items are listed in Table 7 according to degree of use. Eighty-five percent of the responding English language arts teachers indicated routine and regular use of written feedback for the assessment of writing activities. The only other item described as a routine assessment procedure by a majority of teachers was oral feedback for assessing student writing, (58%). Written rubrics or standards for assessing writing and informal(not written) standards were described as routine by an almost identical number of teachers, 204 (45%) and 198 (44%), respectively. The next most frequently selected assessment tool was peer assessment of writing which was described as a routine procedure by approximately one-third of the teachers (36%). Twenty percent of the teachers indicated that they use students' assessments of their own writing when assigning grades.

Examining the data from the opposite point of view, one observes that portfolios had the largest percent of negative responses: 59 percent of the teachers marked, "little or no use." Much of the negative response, however, may have come from teachers who do not assign portfolios.

Judged against standards of assessment competence, informal standards, identified as routine practice by nearly half of the respondents, do not reflect recommended practice (AFT/NEA/NCME, 1990; Huot, 1990). Writing from an instructional perspective, Purves (1993), writes, "...we [teachers] must make explicit, the implicit standards that we have in our heads" (p. 187).

Examined in the context of assessment reform, however, these data might be considered somewhat encouraging. One third of the responses indicate the use of peer assessments and one fifth identified

TABLE 7

Degree of Use of Selected Assessments Tools and Procedures
by High School English Teachers

Tool	Degree of Use: Regular, Routine Use		Occasional Use		Little or No Use	
Assessment Procedure	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Written Feedback on Student Products, Including Writing n=456*	386	84.6	56	12.3	14	3.1
Oral Feedback on Student Products, Including Writing n=455	262	57.6	169	37.1	24	5.3
Written Rubrics/Standards for Assessing Student Writing n=457	204	44.6	182	39.8	71	15.5
Informal (Not written) Standards for Assessing Student Writing n=449	198	44.1	176	39.2	75	16.7
Peer Assessments of Writing n=457	164	35.9	228	49.9	65	14.2
Written Rubrics, Standards For Assessing Performance Tasks (Not Writing) n=452	122	27.0	141	31.2	189	41.8
Students' Written Assessment of Their Own Work n=456	92	20.2	221	48.5	142	31.1
Written Rubrics/Standards for Assessing Portfolios n=445	82	18.4	99	22.2	264	59.3
Observation Checklists n=437	70	16.0	147	33.6	220	50.3

*Differences in 'n' are due to missing data.

self assessment as routine practice. These procedures are congruent with assessment reform direction. The role of students in assessing their own work and taking responsibility for their own learning is one objective of the reform (Lott, 1994; Tierney, et al., 1991). These data support the conclusion that many teachers do involve students in the assessment process, via peer or self assessments, at least occasionally.

Teacher beliefs and values.

Knowing how teachers assess students has limited value in the absence of understanding" why teachers assess as they do. Previous research has focused on teacher preparation, or lack of preparation, in assessment as one reason that many teachers fall short of accepted standards in assessment (Jett & Schafer, 1992; O'Sullivan & Chalnick, 1991; Schafer & Lissitz, 1987). Part II of this study addressed this question from the standpoint of teacher beliefs and values. Teachers were asked to identify, from among 11 items, the three factors which had the greatest influence on their assessment practice. As shown in Figure 1, the primary factors selected were personal: personal beliefs and philosophy (88%) and training and preparation (43%).

Figure 1

Percent of Teachers According to Influences on Classroom Assessment Practices by Category: Personal, Social, and Organizational Factors

n=115

Personal Factors	Social Factors	Organizational Factors
Personal Beliefs, Philosophy (88%)	Expectations of students, parents (18%)	School, Dept., Policies (37%)
Training/preparation (43%)	Expectations of colleagues (16%)	Eligibility requirements (1%)
		Statewide assessments (20%)
		District assessments (8%)
	Expectations: colleges/universities (37%)	
	Expectations: teachers--next grade level (24%)	

In order to ascertain specific beliefs regarding assessment, teachers were directed to identify , from among 15 specific statements, the specific belief statements which most closely reflected their own beliefs and values, relative to five classroom assessment issues:

1) The use of written standards or rubrics for assessing student work;

2) The use of grades as a motivational tool;

3) The purpose and role of assessment as a communication tool;

4) Student self assessment;

5) The degree of choice students should have regarding assessment tasks.

Three of these categories center on issues of current reform: the use of rubrics, student self assessment, and student choice. The two

remaining issues, using grades as a motivational tool and the purpose of assessment relate to achievement and non-achievement related factors. For each issue, three belief statements were listed, and teachers were directed to identify the single statement, per section, which most closely represented their belief regarding that particular issue.

The fifteen statements and the percent of teachers selecting each one are listed in Table 8. Ninety-five percent of the teachers indicated a belief in the value of written standards or rubrics for the assessment of student writing and other performance tasks. Forty five percent of these teachers advocate sharing standards with students at the beginning of every writing assignment; 50 percent indicated, rubrics are "effective tools, but teacher should use them cautiously." The selected belief statements

Nearly all of the responding teachers believe that grades are an important motivator for students; only 13 or 11 percent of the teachers disagreed. Regarding the purpose of assessment, a slight majority of teachers believe grading can be most effective when it is used to reinforce positive attitudes and habits." Only two teachers supported the statement "...effort and student attitudes should not be considered" when grading students.

A majority of teachers indicated that "student reflection and self assessment should [be considered] when assigning final grades." Thirty-seven percent expressed disagreement. Some student choice in assessment activities is generally supported, but a majority, 70 percent, believe "...major assessment tasks should be uniform."

Findings do not support a connection between expressed beliefs regarding the use of rubrics and reported practice as displayed in Table

TABLE 8
(pg. 1)
Number and Percent of Teachers According to Selected Belief Statements

Statement	N	%
Written Standards/Rubrics for Assessing Writing n=115*		
Written standards or rubrics for the assessment of student writing and other structured performance tasks are effective tools, but teachers should use them cautiously in combination with teacher judgment and intuition.	57	49.6
Written standards or rubrics should not only be used for grading but should be given to students at the time of every written assignment.	52	45.2
The idea of standards or rubrics is good, but they need not be formally written since clear criteria exist in the minds of experienced teachers.	6	5.2
Grades as Motivators n=113		
Grades are a primary motivator for most students who will generally put more time and effort into those assignments which "count" the most	73	63.5
Grades are not effective motivators for the majority of students. Other types of motivational strategies should be employed.	27	23.5
Grades are an important motivator; how much individual assignments "count" is probably irrelevant in terms of student time and effort.	13	11.3
Purpose of Assessment/Grades n=114		
Grading can be most effective when it is used to reinforce positive attitudes and habits, including effort and the timely completion of assignments.	59	51.3
Although it is sometimes difficult to separate achievement from effort and positive learner attitudes, grades should primarily communicate levels of achievement.	53	46.1
The purpose of assessment is to communicate levels of achievement; effort and student attitudes should not be considered.	2	1.7

*Differences in 'n' are due to missing data.

TABLE 8
(page 2)

Number and Percent of Teachers According to Selected Belief Statements

Statement	N	%
Student Voice in Assessing Grades n=115*		
Student reflection and self assessment are indicators of achievement and teachers should consider them when assigning final grades.	63	54.8
Student self assessment, while a worthwhile instructional tool, should not be a consideration when course grades are assigned.	42	36.5
Assessment is the responsibility of the teacher; the involvement of students in this area is not appropriate.	10	8.7
Degree of Student Choice in Selecting Assignments n=113		
Some student choice is appropriate, but major assessment tasks should be uniform among all students.	80	69.6
Students should have choices regarding their own major assessment activities and tasks.	20	17.4
Students should be held to the same assessment activities and tasks in order to ensure consistent and fair grading.	13	11.3

*Differences in 'n' are due to missing data.

Table 7. Although nearly all teachers selected statements in favor of the use of written standards or rubrics, only 45% reported routine use of rubrics for assessing student writing. An almost equal number 44 percent indicated regular and routine use of informal (not written) standards. Another way to interpret these findings is that teachers are at an awareness level regarding rubrics. In other words, they know about rubrics, may have had some experience with them, and believe that they "could be" useful in the classroom, but they are not yet ready to implement them personally.

The most congruent findings were relative to non-achievement behaviors and reported practice. Eighty-six percent of the teachers indicated support of grading "to reinforce positive attitudes and habits." Sixty four percent of the teachers indicated a belief in grades as a means to motivate students. These beliefs are consistent with the data in Table 5 indicating that virtually all of the responding teachers give some consideration to non-achievement factors when grading students.

Are there significant differences among assessment practices and beliefs according to grade or ability level of students, percent of minority population?

The significance of this question relates directly to one of the major thrusts of assessment reform: to improve equity and access to the core curriculum by improving opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Performance assessment and, in English language arts, specifically writing portfolios, are viewed by researchers and an increasing number of vocal practitioners as one means of expanding opportunities for lower socio economic groups, typically minorities, to demonstrate their learning (Mitchell, 1991; Garcia &

Pearson, 1991; Hiebert, 1991). These are the groups of students who have performed least well on standardized measures of assessment.

In order to respond to this question, an analysis of variance procedure was conducted using SPSSMac to identify the degree of difference among responses according to specified student, teacher, and organizational variables. For the purposes of this discussion, only differences according to student variables (grade level, ability level of the class, percent of minority student population) are reported.

Over three dozen assessment activities, tools, or related factors were included in Survey One. In order to give meaning to the analysis of variance, these variables were clustered into five categories. One variable (writing portfolios) was treated separately resulting in a total of six dependent variables, each representing a definable set of items.

In clustering these items, a score for each of the new dependent variables was obtained by adding the number of "regular/routine responses" within each cluster. Thus, for example, the survey contained five paper and pencil activities. Had a teacher marked regular/routine use for all five, the teacher would have received a score of 20, since each regular/routine mark was worth four points. Had the teacher marked only two of the five as regular/routine, the score would have been eight, etc. A summary of the newly created variables is provided below:

Figure 4.6
Summary of Clustered Dependent Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Score: Routine Use	Range of Scores
Paper and Pencil Activities	5	4	4 - 20
Writing Activities	9	4	4 - 32
Portfolios:	1	4#	1 - 4
Performance Tasks	4	4	4 - 16
Assessment Tools	9	3	3 - 27
Non-Achievement Related Factors	6	3	3 - 18

*All scores counted, 1-4, for this item.

Multiple ANOVAS were used in this analysis; therefore, the Bonferroni inequality was employed in order to keep overall alpha = 0.05 (Stevens, 1986). Dividing the desired alpha (.05) by the number of independent variables (12), resulted in a calculated alpha of .004.

Review of Findings: p<.004

Statistically significant findings (<.004) were found relative to three student variables: student ability level; percent of minority population, and grade level.

- Routine use of a variety of writing activities differed significantly according to student ability level F[(4,419)=3.97(p<.004)]. The Scheffé test of significance indicated that significantly more writing assignments are routinely assigned in classes designated as

honors, mean = 17, as opposed to classes of average students, mean = 13.6 or classes consisting primarily of below-average students, mean = 12.5.

•Routine use of writing portfolios varied according to percent of minority student population [$F(4,449)=7.3(p<.004)$]. Teachers in schools with the smallest percent of minority students (<20%), used portfolios significantly more often, mean = 3.2, than teachers in schools with the largest percent of minority students (80-99%), mean = 2.0.

•Routine use of portfolios also varied significantly according to grade level. Teachers of combination-grade classes, typically identified as lab classes, reported considerably less use of portfolios, mean = 1.9, than did teachers of grade 9 and grade 10 students, students, mean = 2.7 [$F(4,446)=4.3(p<.004)$].

Table 9 was developed in order to display, at a glance, the summative findings. All dependent variables are listed by column and the independent variables by row. Displayed within each resulting cell, in matrix fashion, is the specific probability value found for that relationship. Probability levels <.004 are marked with an asterisk. A benefit of Table 9 is that it provides an opportunity to identify patterns of responses across both dependent and independent variables. Using this table as a reference point, therefore, the discussion of findings focuses on two patterns: 1) Differences according to percent of minority student population and 2) Differences according to student ability level.

TABLE 9

Summary of Probability Levels Between Dependent and Independent Student Variables
p<.004 = Significant*

Dependent Variables

	Paper/Pencil Activities	Writing Activities	Portfolios	Performance Tasks	Assessment Tools	Non-Achievement Factors
STUDENT VARIABLES						
Percent Minority Population	.17	.02	.000*	.24	.01	.92
Grade Level	.95	.32	.002*	.18	.07	.23
Ability Level	.92	.004*	.04	.06	.06	.20

**Data calculated using SPSSMac ANOVA Procedure

The next section describes these patterns. Data are descriptive only; SPSS CrossTabs was used to tabulate the number of routine activities used by each group of teachers. For each independent variable within the identified pattern, the data identify the number and percent of teachers reporting the routine and regular use of 50 percent or more of the specified assessment activities or assessment tools and procedures. Quantifying the number of activities used describes in concrete terms the differences between groups and supports the evidence of identifiable patterns according to independent variables.

Summary of Differences According to Percent of Minority Student Population

Teachers in schools with a high percentage of minority students responded differently regarding their use of writing activities, portfolios, and assessment tools. In each instance the probability level, though not significant, was determined in the analysis of variance to be <.05, based on the average responses of teachers in each group. Instead of comparing the average responses of teachers, the data in Table10 describe how many teachers in each group reported that they use at least 50 percent of the designated activities routinely. As shown in Table 10, the number of teachers within each of these groups varies, with the fewest number of reporting teachers, 26, representing schools with <20 percent minority students. Nevertheless, differences between this group and others are large enough to suggest evidence of a pattern supporting the hypothesis that teachers in schools with larger numbers of minority students assign a smaller variety of writing activities and use fewer assessment tools.

TABLE 10

Number and Percent of Teachers
Using Multiple Selected Assessment Activities and Procedures Routinely
According to Percent of Minority Student Population

Percent of Minority Student Population

Activities/Tools	80-99%		60-79%		40-59%		20-39%		<20%		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Five or More Writing Activities Used Routinely	n= 92		n= 109		n= 119		n= 126		n= 26		n= 472	
	17	18.5	33	30.3	29	24.4	38	30.2	13	50	130	28
Portfolios Used Routinely	n= 89		n= 105		n= 111		n= 123		n= 26		n= 454	
	16	18	39	37	36	32	37	31	18	69	146	32
Five or More Assessment Tools/ Procedures	n= 92		n= 109		n= 119		n= 126		n= 26		n= 472	
	17	18	25	23	31	26	41	33	12	46	126	27

Writing activities.

Only 17 or 19 percent of the 92 responding teachers with the highest percentage of minority students (80-99%) indicated regular and routine use of at least five types of writing activities. In contrast, 13 or 50 percent of the teachers in schools with less than 20 percent minority students indicated routine use of at least five writing activities. The average percentage of use across all groups was 27% (472/130); only one group of teachers reported use below the average: those from schools with the highest percentage of minority students.

Portfolios.

Similar differences are apparent regarding the use of portfolios. Sixteen, or 18 percent of teachers within the 80-99 percent minority schools reported that they routinely use writing portfolios, while 18 or 69% of those in the <20 percent minority schools. Approximately one third of the remaining teachers, those with between 20 and 79 percent minority students, reported routine use of a minimum of five writing activities (31 to 37%).

Assessment tools and procedures.

The pattern connecting assessment practice to percent of minority students remains the same in regard to teacher use of assessment tools and procedures--a not surprising congruence considering the practical relationship between activity and assessment procedure. The largest percentage of teachers (46 percent) reporting routine use of five or more assessment tools or procedures were in schools with the smallest percentage of minority students, >20 percent; the smallest percentage of teachers reporting this degree of use were those in schools with the largest percent of minority students, 80-99 percent. The remaining

groups of teachers ranged from 23 to 33 percent who reported this frequency of use.

Summary of Differences According to Student Ability Level

The pattern relative to student ability level goes across four areas of assessment: writing activities; portfolios; performance assessments; and assessment tools and procedures. Table 11 illustrates these findings by identifying the number and percent of teachers using fifty percent or more of these activities routinely according to student ability level. As displayed in Table 11 and discussed below, the number of teachers reporting routine use generally declines steadily across ability levels, with teachers of higher ability level students reporting greater use of a variety of assessment activities and procedures.

Writing activities.

Forty-five percent of the teachers with honors level students report routine use of at least five of the nine writing activities included in the survey. In contrast, only 21 percent of teachers of students identified as below average report similar routine usage. As shown in the first row of Table 11, the percent of teachers reporting this level of use declines steadily according to student ability level. The average number of teachers reporting routine use of at least five writing activities was 28 percent.

Portfolios.

Portfolios are used routinely by 47 percent of the responding teachers with honors students; by 37 percent of teachers with above average students; 31 percent of teachers with mixed ability classes; 25

TABLE 11

Number and Percent of Teachers
Using Multiple Selected Assessment Activities and Procedures Routinely
According to Student Ability Level

Student Ability Level

Activities/Tools	Below Avg		Average		Mixed		Above Avg		Honors		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Five or More Writing Activities Used Routinely	n= 52		n= 128		n= 128		n= 62		n= 89		n= 459	
	11	21.2	28	21.9	31	24.2	19	30.6	40	44.9	125	28
Portfolios Used Routinely	n= 52		n= 125		n= 124		n= 60		n= 86		n= 447	
	14	27	31	25	38	31	22	37	40	47	145	32
Three or More Assessment Tools/ Procedures	n= 52		n= 128		n= 128		n= 62		n= 89		n= 459	
	8	15.4	39	30.5	41	32	22	35.5	37	42	147	32
Five or More Assessment Tools/ Procedures	n= 52		n= 128		n= 128		n= 52		n= 128		n= 459	
	10	19	35	27	25	20	10	19	35	27	124	27

percent of teachers with average students; and by 27 percent of the teachers with students described as below average.

Performance tasks.

Forty-two percent of the teachers of honors students report the routine use of at least three performance assessment tasks while only 15 percent of the teachers with below average students report this degree of use. Once again, the percent of teachers reporting this level of use declines steadily according to student ability level. The average percent across all groups is 32 percent.

Assessment tools and procedures.

Forty percent of the teachers with honors students report routine use of five or more assessment tools and procedures. This is a considerably larger percent than for any other group of reporting teachers: 29 percent for teachers with above average students; twenty percent for teachers with average ability level students; 27 percent for teachers with mixed ability groups; and only 19 percent for teachers of below average students. This is the only category where the decline in percent of reporting teachers is not completely consistent across all groups, although the strongest contrast remains between teachers of honors students and teachers of students who were designated by responding teachers as below average.

Discussion and Conclusions

This was a descriptive study designed to profile current assessment practice in high school English language arts classes and to provide an informed base for assessment reform. Responding teachers represented the breadth of medium to large California high schools, and

responses were stratified according to percent of minority population. The study is limited by the constraints inherent in survey research dependent on volunteers.

Two questions framed this review of data: 1) What are the prevalent classsroom assessment practices and beliefs among California high school English language arts teachers and to what degree do they reflect assessment reform? 2) Do practices differ according to percent of minority students, student ability level, or student grade level?

Assessment Activities and Procedures

Assessment activities among California high school teachers of English tend to be a mix of traditional paper and pencil activities and formal writing assignments. Although paper and pencil activities appear to dominate in terms of regular and routine use, writing activities carry more weight when teachers compute course grades. Writing portfolios are not in general use as evidenced by a 30% response. On the other hand, a majority of teachers indicated the routine use of informal performance assessments, (i.e. group and class participation), while 45 percent assign group products and presentations.

There is nothing among this data to ameliorate concerns about teachers' general competence as assessors, but neither is there cause for alarm. Among the 467 teachers responding to this research, most rely on written or oral feedback as an assessment tool while nearly half routinely use informal means of assessing student work as opposed to explicit, written standards. On the other hand, a matching number use rubrics or written standards routinely.

Findings from this study confirm much of the earlier research regarding the types of assessments used by teachers. California high school English language arts teachers reported an even stronger dependence on teacher-developed tests over published exams than previous research on classroom assessment practice had indicated. (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992; Dorr-Bremme & Herman, 1986). An additional finding which is consistent with earlier research, is the consideration of non-achievement factors as part of the grading process (Pilcher,1994; Brookhart,1991; Stiggins, et al,1989; Barnes, 1985). Student grades reflect a combination of achievement and non-achievement related factors; the use of grades as a motivational tool is commonplace. Aside from the issues of effective practice, the consideration of effort and other student behaviors not directly related to achievement raises issues of communication.

Expressed teacher beliefs may be more reflective of assessment reform than is reported assessment practice (e.g. rubrics are valued by virtually all respondents, but used by less than half). Most teachers also indicated that student self assessment is a valuable resource and should be considered when grading; only 29 percent indicated that they routinely use students' evaluation of their own work. Another 49 percent indicated occasional use of student self assessment. One interpretation is that both rubrics and student self assessment are reforms still at the awareness level among most teachers.

Teacher responses do not support a direct impact from high stakes performance tests. Asked directly about the greatest influences on their practice, only 20 percent marked statewide assessments. Far more important, according to this data, were personal factors including beliefs

and values (88 %) and training and preparation (43 %). More than a third (37%) marked school and department policies.

Differences in Practice According to Student Characteristics

Although the findings from this study suggest that portfolios and other performance assessments in English language arts classes continue to be the exception, *the classes in which reform is least evident appear to be in schools with the highest percentage of minority students and in classes deemed to be lower ability classes.* Students in higher ability classes and in schools with smaller percentages of minority students are more likely to be assigned a variety of performance assessment tasks including portfolios; among all types of variables, student variables may be among the most influential factors affecting classroom assessment practice in English language arts.

Assessment reform has been touted as one way to improve student success by providing more contextualized opportunities for all students to demonstrate what they know, understand, and are able to do. The possibility that students in largely minority schools may have less access to these means of demonstrating their achievement has imposing implications for practitioners. If these discrepancies are true; the implications are an imperative for action.

Implications for Policy and Research

Assessment and district policy

In Alice in Wonderland, Alice asks the Rabbit, which road she should take. The Rabbit replies, "It depends on where you want to go." The same might be said of assessment. Schools and school districts

must make purposeful and informed decisions regarding the purpose of assessment and how assessment information should be communicated to students, parents, and the larger community. One of the questions which needs to be addressed is, "What do and should grades represent?" If grades in English language arts represent "more" or "less" than student achievement, some clarification for those who receive these grades appears appropriate. Parents and others make assumptions regarding student achievement, based on grades. High school grades become part of a student's transcript and can significantly affect that student's educational future. The establishment of agreed-upon content and performance standards and assessment tasks which clearly demonstrate student competence relative to these standards is one way to address this issue. The key words are "agreed-upon standards," standards which all stakeholders value. Including teachers in these decisions and the development of policies has a greater potential of affecting practice than relying on high-stakes exams, no matter how well designed, designed to drive curriculum and instruction.

In reviewing these findings and the literature on classroom assessment, I am compelled to ask, "What is the difference between teachers using grades as a lever for students and policy makers using assessments to pressure teachers into reform?" If the former is poor practice, so is the latter.

Issues of equity and student access.

The association between student ability level and the percent of minority student population and opportunities to engage in more authentic kinds of assessment has important implications for practitioners and policy makers. Tracking students according to

student ability level is not recommended practice; the evidence that teachers differentiate their instruction according to student ability and to the detriment of students considered less able is persuasive (Page, 1991;Glickman, 1990; Goodlad, 1984). The pattern of findings in this study adds weight to arguments against ability grouping.

Implications for Research

Based on the findings and conclusions resulting from this study, implications for future research exist in two areas. The first concerns students, the second area focuses on teachers.

Among all the stakeholders in the assessment process, it is students who are most affected by classroom assessment practice, either favorably or negatively. What little research there is regarding assessment and students has been instructive. Crooks (1988) documented the ways assessment affects students' views of themselves as learners and development of particular learning styles. Pilcher's 1994 case study suggests that the relationship between grades and motivation is complex. We could benefit from more research examining assessment from the student's experience and perspective. All valuing aside regarding the relative worth of extrinsic versus intrinsic rewards, instructional practice would benefit from knowing whether or not most students are motivated by grades. Does the motivational impact of grades differ according to ability level or past academic success? More in-depth case studies focusing on all the variables are warranted.

The purpose of all reform is to effect qualitative change in the classroom. Teachers control classrooms. It is a reasonable public expectation that teachers be skilled in the development, selection, and

interpretation of a variety of measurement tools. More than that, it is a professional obligation. WYTIWYG ("what you test is what you get") is a nice slogan, but a simplistic strategy which ignores the pivotal role of teachers' day-to-day decision making. O'Sullivan and Johnson's 1993 study suggests that focused preservice instruction in classroom assessment can effect improvement in teacher competence. We need further evidence regarding what works and what does not work in developing the kind of teacher competence which transfers from the training room to the classroom.

Concluding Comments

The focus of this study evolved over a three-year period. My initial research interest was performance assessment, specifically portfolio assessment and how portfolio assessment affects the culture of a classroom. My initial premise was that large-scale assessment reform would provide the leverage which would drive instructional and classroom assessment reform. I began my research with a case study of two high school English teachers who were implementing portfolios as a significant part of their assessment practice (Cox, 1993). As a former high school English teacher with 17 years experience, these classrooms provided a familiar milieu for my investigation and a meaningful reality check. Three propositions resulted from that study:

1. The culture of high school classroom assessment is complex and characterized by both explicit and implicit norms of behavior which, roughly translated, define the "rules of the game."

2. A single classroom innovation in assessment tends to shape itself to existing norms, rather than effectively altering those norms.

3. If reform efforts centering on assessment fail to deal explicitly with existing assessment norms, the chances for genuine change occurring are minimal. (Cox, 1993, p. 1).

I believe that action must begin with a shared commitment to build a teaching force which is "assessment literate." Districts must support inservice training which goes beyond awareness; teacher education programs must build testing and measurement courses which are relevant to classroom practice, and make them a required part of instruction. The standards developed by the American Federation of Teachers in conjunction with the National Council of Measurement in Education and the National Education Association can provide a base for developing essential competencies in assessment.

Finally, policy makers at every level would be well advised to reexamine their assumptions regarding assessment and accountability and to consider a reallocation of resources as close to the classroom as possible. Reform in public education is imperative; the stakes are high. The only reform that "counts," however, is that which occurs in the classroom.

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Assessment Activities and Procedures in
High School English Language Arts Classes

April, 1994

Dear English Language Arts Teacher,

I taught high school English for 17 years, and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of California, Riverside. If you are currently teaching three or more English classes, I need your help in order to conduct the research required for my doctoral dissertation.

As you know, much of the current educational reform effort focuses on assessment. In California and across the nation there has been a move from norm reference standardized testing to assessments which are "performance based." This is exemplified in California by the CAP direct writing assessment which began in 1986 and the integrated language arts assessment which the state initiated last year as part of CLAS, the California Learning Assessment System.

Amidst all these reform efforts, however, little attention has been paid to what is occurring in classrooms. We know much more about large scale assessments than we do about classroom assessment practices. The purpose of this study is to provide a picture of current student assessment practices in high school English language arts classes in California.

Your school was selected as part of a random selection process among medium to large high schools in California. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to participate or not in all or any part of this study, to answer or decline to answer any question. No information on individual teachers will be provided to any school, district, or other agency or individual. Completion of this survey should take no more than 12 minutes. A stamped, addressed envelope is provided for return of the questionnaire. I will send participants the aggregate results of this study when completed.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. Should you have any questions, please contact me at the number(s) listed below. I would be pleased to speak with you or to respond in writing.

Keni Brayton Cox
Phone: 714 281 7783 (h) 909 788 7150 (w)
Fax: 714 280 0139

Course/Class Selection: The first step in completing this questionnaire is to identify a specific class and course which you are currently teaching. Please list below the title and grade level of your Period 2 class (if you do not teach a period 2 English Language Arts class, or your school has alternative scheduling, identify the second English class you taught during the current week). It will be easier for you to respond to the questions below if you have a specific course and class in mind.

PERIOD 2 CLASS OR ALTERNATE AS EXPLAINED ABOVE

- Course title: _____ Grade level:_____
- Circle the most appropriate descriptor of student ability in this class:

  Mixed Honors Above Average Average Below average
- Number of Limited English Proficient students in the identified class:___
- Total number of English classes you currently teach:_____

Respond to all questions as they apply to the procedures you use for this specific class. There are no expected answers. Types of assessments used are expected to vary. The intent is to supply a picture of current assessment activities and procedures.

Important: Please do not proceed until you have identified a specific class.

Assessment Activities and Procedures in
High School English Language Arts Classes

Part I: Language Arts teachers typically use a wide variety of assessment activities to determine student grades. For the purposes of this survey an "assessment activity" is one which is scored in some way and which "counts" in computing a student's final grade.

Listed below are types of activities used for assessment/grading purposes in language arts classes. Beside each item, mark the number of the statement which most closely describes your use of that item in the class you identified on page 1.

1= I do not currently use this type of assessment activity for this class.

2= I use this type of activity, but it is not scored or used for assessment or grading purposes for this class.

3= I occasionally use this type of activity for assessment or grading purposes for this class.

4= This is a regular and routine activity used for assessment or grading puposes for this class.

Pencil and Paper Activities (not including compositions/essays)

____Teacher developed tests and/or quizzes
____Published tests and quizzes (e.g. from a text or literature series)
____District-developed tests and/or quizzes
____Department-developed tests and/or quizzes
____Daily homework or in-class assignments
____Other(please specify)_____

Writing Activities (including essays /compositions)

_____On-demand writing assignments (essays completed during a single class session)
_____Integrated reading/writing assessments (e.g CLAS-like activities)
_____Final-drafts of preassigned compositions
_____Stages of the writing process (e.g. pre drafting, editing, etc.)
_____Journals or daily writing logs
_____Writing portfolios
_____Creative writing assignments (e.g. poetry, narratives)
_____Long-term writing assignments such as a research paper
_____District-level writing assessments
_____Other (please specify)_____

Performance Assessments--(not including compositions/essays)

____Individual oral presentations
____Individual products (e.g. art projects suitable for display)
____Group products or oral presentations
____Group or class participation
____Other (please specify)_____

Assessment Activities and Procedures
in High School English Language Arts Classes

Part II: Below is a list of assessment tools and procedures. Using the scale provided below, identify the descriptor which best describes your use of these items relative to the class specified on page 1.

1= I never or almost never use this assessment tool or procedure in this class.

2= I occasionally use this assessment tool or procedure in this class.

3= I routinely use this assessment tool or procedure in this class.

____Written rubrics or standards for assessing student writing
____Written rubrics or standards for assessing student performance activities other than writing
____Written rubrics or standards for scoring portfolios
____Informal (not written) standards for assessing writing.
____Written feedback on student products (including writing)
____Oral feedback on student products (including writing)
____Observation checklists
____Students' written assessments of their own work
____Peer assessments (feedback from other students)
____Other (please specify)_____

Part III: Factors considered when grading. Teachers frequently report that a number of factors, not directly related to achievement, contribute to determining final grades for students. For each student behavior identified below, indicate the degree of consideration you give each one when assigning student grades in the class identified on page 1.

1= Not considered 2= Moderate consideration 3= Primary consideration

___Effort/willingness to learn
___Student ability relative to achievement
___Completion of assignments
___Extra credit
___On-time completion of assignments
___Class attendance
___Other (please specify)
_____

Part IV: Weighting of factors. Although teachers may consider a number of factors and scores when computing a student's final course grade, not all items are given equal weight or value. Each of the categories included in this survey is listed below. Indicate in the space provided the degree of importance that you give each one when computing a student's final grade. Respond in the context of how you grade students in the class and course identified on page 1.

1= Not important 2= Secondary importance 3= Primary importance

_____Paper and pencil tests and quizzes
_____Individual products (other than writing)
_____Individual oral presentations
_____Group products or presentations
_____Essays/compositions/creative writing
_____Daily homework/ in-class assignments
___Portfolios (graded as a whole)
___Individual student behaviors (e.g. effort, attendance, on-time completion)
___Other (please specify)
_____

Assessment Activities and Procedures
in High School English Language Arts Classes

Part V: To determine how assessment practice may be related to other factors, it is helpful to know something about the teachers who complete this questionnaire. Please take a few moments to respond to the following items:

1. Gender: __Female __Male 2. Ethnicity (optional)_____

3. Teaching Experience in Years: Total teaching experience:_____
This subject:_____
This school:_____

4. Have you attended the California Writing Project? **Yes** **No** If "yes," what year?_____

5. Have you attended the California Literature Project? **Yes** **No** If "yes," what year?_____

6. If you answered "yes" to 4 and/or 5 above, what has been your degree of involvement in the project(s), since initial participation?_____
_____

7. Undergraduate major/minor:_____Graduate Degree(s)_____

Part VI: For each numbered item, check the categories or descriptors which describe your department or school organizational structure. Check all that apply.

1. ___ Departmentalized __Interdisciplinary Teaming __Core (subjects?)_____
__**Other** (please specify)_____

2. ___ Students organized by grade level only __Students in houses, families, or academies
___ **Other** (please specify)_____

3. __Traditional Scheduling (e.g. 5-7 periods a day)
__Alternative scheduling (e.g. block, rotating)
__**Other** (please specify)_____

4. Please identify any specific restructuring projects or grants in process at your school (e.g. 1274 grant; 1882 grant; Calif. Assessment Consortium; technology grants, etc.).

Follow-up Study: This questionnaire was designed as a general survey of current assessment practices in high school English Language Arts classes in California. A second questionnaire, of somewhat shorter length, has been designed as a follow up. Volunteers who complete and return the second questionnaire will select a modest gift certificate to Crown Books, or equivalent sum as a token of appreciation for the extra effort given this professional endeavor. Confidentiality and the anonymity of all participants are guaranteed.

"I volunteer to be a participant in the follow-up to this survey. This is entirely voluntary, and I may change my mind at any time. The second questionnaire should require no longer than 10 minutes to complete, and all responses are confidential. I also understand that I will receive a gift certificate as a token of appreciation."

NAME_____

School Name and District **OR** Preferred Mailing Address:

_____

City_____ Zip_____

Phone:_____-_____

PLEASE PRINT

THANK YOU
Please return entire form in the stamped envelope.
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